

Women raise their voices against tree plantations The role of the European Union in disempowering women in the South¹

Vast areas of land where diverse and rich ecosystems predominate are being replaced with large scale tree plantations in the South. These plantations –whether eucalyptus, pines, rubber, oil palm or other- are resulting in serious impacts on local communities, who see their ecosystems and livelihoods destroyed to make way to industrial tree plantations. Apart from affecting communities as a whole, they result in specific and differentiated impacts on women which translate in their disempowerment.

What most people in Europe are unaware of is that the European Union is a major actor in the promotion of such plantations in the South, and is therefore playing a role in disempowering women in the South. While the EU has signed a number of treaties and conventions and developed a major body of legislation aimed at achieving gender equality in the European Union, the issue of gender justice seems to lose its importance for the EU outside its borders.

The articles below are the result of three workshops conducted in late 2008 in Papua New Guinea, Nigeria and Brazil within the framework of a joint project between Friends of the Earth International and the World Rainforest Movement.

In the case of Papua New Guinea the workshop was carried out in collaboration with the local organization CELCOR/Friends of the Earth-PNG. It refers to oil palm plantations that are being mainly promoted to feed the European market with palm oil (used in products such as cosmetics, soap, vegetable oil and foodstuffs) as well as for the production of agrofuels.

The second case is that of Nigeria –organized in collaboration with Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria- which is about rubber plantations established on the lands of a local community by the France-based Michelin company for producing rubber used in the manufacture of tyres.

And finally the Brazilian case –in collaboration with NAT/Friends of the Earth Brazil- is about eucalyptus plantations set up by three companies -the Swedish-Finnish Stora Enso, Aracruz Celulose and Votorantim- for producing pulp for export to Europe for converting it there into paper.

The main aim of this collaborative effort is to support the struggle of these and many other women facing similar situations throughout the countries of the South. At the same, we aim at raising awareness among EU citizens –women and men- about how their governments are promoting policies that favour corporate investments in the South and on how those investments impact on communities in general and on women in particular. As a result of increased awareness, we hope that EU citizens and their organizations will join in the effort to create a socially equitable and environmentally sustainable world –North and South- where gender justice can become a reality for all. The voices of Southern women are becoming louder.

Nigeria: Michelin rubber plantations

Most of the world rubber production goes for the manufacturing of tyres for different types of vehicles, from cars, to trucks, airplanes and so on. The number of tyres produced annually is huge and statistics show that 1.3 billion tyres were produced in 2007.

¹ Summarized version of the full report available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/women/fullreport.pdf>

South East Asian countries (Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) are the major producers of natural rubber in the world, while Africa produces some 5% of global natural rubber production. Within Africa, the main producing countries are Nigeria (300,000 hectares), Liberia (100,000) and Cote d'Ivoire (70,000).

The multinational companies Michelin and Bridgestone, are the major players in the world tyre production. Both of them are active in Africa where they have set up their rubber plantations. Bridgestone/Firestone Corporation has its conflictive plantations established in Liberia²

The France-based transnational company Michelin, one of the major players in world tyre production, has quite recently established rubber plantations in Nigeria.

On May 29, 2007, over 3,500 hectares of Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve -including individual and communal farmlands- were allotted to Michelin to be converted into rubber plantations without the consent of community people or proper Environmental Impact Assessment.

“I don't want money. I want my land back...if they give me one million Naira [the local currency] today, I will still go broke, but if I have my land I can always farm to take care of my family and possibly pass the land on to my children.” Woman from Iguoriakhi

Iguobazuwa is home to a population of more than 20,000 agrarian people, 85% of whom depend on the dense forest for their daily livelihoods. The forest is rich in biodiversity, including animals such as monkeys, antelope, grasscutter, tortoise, snails and birds. Iguobazuwa was also a place where food crops were produced like cassava, yam, plantain, pineapple, melon, corn and vegetables, whether edible or medicinal.

Communities surrounding the Iguobazuwa forest include Aifesoba, Iguoriakhi, Igueihase, Ora, Amienghomwan, Ugbokun, Obaretin, Obosogbe, Okoro and Iguobazuwa. Although the forest land legally belongs to the Government, in 1972 communities were granted rights over it, with some parts of those forests allocated rotationally to members of the community for use as farmlands.

In December 2007, Michelin bulldozed the 3,500 hectares of forests as well as the people's farmlands, leaving the affected community people uncompensated. Local people found themselves from one day to another with both sources of livelihood –their forest and farmlands- completely destroyed. Iguobazuwa communities lost everything.

In May 2008, the company started planting the rubber trees. Although the trees are still at an early stage, as the experience in many other countries shows, communities will have to also face the additional impacts resulting from the plantations themselves.

“Two years after my husband's death, I started farming... Michelin came with his evil bulldozer and destroyed everything I had planted. I was crying...I was trying to stop them; they threatened to bulldoze me with their caterpillar if I don't allow them.” Mabel Ubara

Farmer women now jobless...

The unholy arrival of Michelin to Iguobazuwa forest after over 300 years of peaceful co-existence among communities has brought nothing but hunger, malnutrition, diseases, poverty, air and water pollution, soil erosion, social dislocation, increase in social vices, alteration of age-old traditional practices, lack of fuel wood and bush meat.

Their destroyed farms had produced a number of diverse food crops:

² Further information can be accessed at WRM web site, WRM Bulletins 134 & 102

"I had two acres of farmland in which I planted cassava, plantains, pineapples, cocoyam, pepper, and pineapples. Now, the farm is gone and I couldn't have any source of food or livelihood anymore." Woman from Aifesoba village

The majority of the women who shared their experiences said that usually the man prepares the farmland for planting and the woman takes care of all the other activities from cultivation to harvesting. So it is women who use the land for cultivation of crops. Now that they find their farmlands destroyed women have become farm labourers in other farms in nearby forests or villages yet to be affected by the rampaging Michelin; while others have been rendered jobless, and hungry.

"Michelin has destroyed our farmlands. I feel pained by their actions. The farms used to provide food for our families. I used to assist in paying my children's school fees. We want them to pay for our crops and farmlands. They should leave our lands for us. We want our land back. Our lives depend on it. Now we are jobless. No more bitter leaves, water leaves and pumpkin leaves. My husband has been jobless for years; we can't afford to depend on our husbands for everything. We want Michelin to compensate us...the value is too much to ignore." Woman from Aifesoba community

... and pennyless

Usually women got the money from what they sell from the farm produce at the local market. Hence, the robbery of their farms have greatly affected the women folk as a lot of the responsibilities for family upkeep rest on the women, so they have no other choice than to resort to menial jobs in order to survive.

"Aren't these people sending us to go and steal?' They took away my four acre land and the source of livelihood for my family. They drove me away from the farm while I was still working, without any explanation or compensation. My husband lost his job as a driver in the city and I have four children, all of whom are now out of school for lack of school fees." Helen Onwe, from Aifesoba community

The majority of the women now engage in small scale subsistence farming within their compounds. Some buy cassava crops from those who have, and process them for sale when they mature.

Caretaker women in trouble

Apart from being in charge of water uses for domestic activities, clothing provision and collection of seeds and fruits, women are responsible of collecting medicinal plants that are vital in local communities' traditional practices linked to health. The disappearance of the forests has caused that now women must go far away -with the shortest distance of about 15km apart- to get herbs to treat some ailments.

"I am pregnant and ill, and the herbs are nowhere to be found. Before now, we used to go to the bush to get herbs to cure all sorts of ailments. You know there are some ailments that orthodox medicines cannot cure; but now we cannot access them because Michelin has bulldozed our forests. You can see that my legs and limbs are swollen; unlike before when I get pregnant, I cannot get those very effective herbs for my condition anymore." Heavily pregnant woman from Aifesoba

As a woman from Iguoriakhi says:

"We just know that Michelin is doing the damage. They are the people we are seeing. In the past we fed from the forest; our life depended on the forest. There are a lot of people in my community that do not know where hospitals are, because the forest provides their medicinal needs."

An 83 year old woman from Iguobazuwa community explains the situation as follows:

"I have lived in Iguobazuwa for 65 years. I used to go to the forest to pluck some medicinal herbs to treat my children whenever they fall ill. It was from the forest I got medicinal leaves to treat myself all through the years of my several times of pregnancy."

Women standing up for their rights

Women know that nothing good for them has or will result from the activities of Michelin in their area. They are starting to organize themselves and are looking for support. They want their lands back, their trees planted again and also to be fully compensated for the destroyed crops.

They are decided to carry out actions, protest marches, and demonstrations to Michelin Nigeria to enforce their demands in resisting all forms of large scale tree plantations in their territories.

"If I have my way, I would stop them from buying our lands for rubber plantation...If I have my way, I would uproot the whole rubber plantation with my hands... They should leave our land for us."

For that, they need to overcome some problems. As Enoma Oduwa, from Iguobazuwa community says:

In the past, we used to have a women group, but now, it no longer exist. That is one of the reasons why we have not been able to confront them as a group. No unity, no resistance!

Traditionally, Iguobazuwa women have not participated in any form of resistance, until recently when some community women and some men from Aifesoba and Obosogbe communities engaged in a protest march in Benin city to denounce the activities of Michelin in their locality.

More recently, women have become more assertive to know and exercise their rights, the value of their forest and how to become more active in the decision making process as it relates to good forest management practices in their localities.

In Aifesoba community, the women -in the company of men- engaged in a protest march to the forest area where Michelin's trucks and bulldozers were busy felling trees. They stopped them from working on two occasions; on the third time Michelin got mobile police men to guard them and to intimidate and scare the community people away. As a result, some women from other communities are now scared of taking any move to confront Michelin as they are afraid of being maltreated, intimidated or harassed the way Aifesoba community people were treated.

As a fallout from the 2-day workshop held on the 4th -5th November 2008, Michelin called some members of two communities (Aifesoba, and Iguobazuwa) out of the nine communities directly impacted, and payed them compensation. One group from Iguobazuwa was paid fully while the other community from Aifesoba was payed what the community people described as peanuts, as according to them, it was a far cry from the extent of destruction and was not commensurate with the amount valued for the crops destroyed.

At the end of the workshop the women released a communiqué in which they demanded a series of urgent actions. Among them, they demanded that the current Edo State Government should review the sale of Iguobazuwa forest reserve, that Michelin Nigeria should return their lands to them and replant every tree fell, with full compensation for crops destroyed, and that the invasion of their forests by Michelin Nigeria should not be seen as a sign of development, but of impoverishment, as their lives and livelihoods have been jeopardized and that further expansion into their lands at Iguobazuwa MUST STOP.

But the most important thing is their determination to get their lands back.

Papua New Guinea: Oil Palm changing traditional livelihoods

Palm oil makes up more than a third of the world's vegetable oil market, with soy in the second place. Palm oil is mostly traded in China and the European Union.

The oil derived from the palm is extensively used for food production and also with industrial purposes (for cosmetics production, lubricant oils, detergents, etc) as well as for energy production (biodiesel).

Palm oil exports have more than doubled over the last 10 years, and it is expected to continue to grow. Among the reasons that explain the growth of the demand there are two that appear to be among the more relevant.

On the one hand, the increase of palm oil use in food production. This increase is due to two factors. A) the recent substitution –because of associated health risks- of trans fats used in food production with palm oil³. B) the increasing absorption of EU produced rapeseed oil for biodiesel uses has lead to a considerable gap in EU food oil supplies, EU palm oil imports have already doubled during the 2000-2006 period⁴.

On the other hand, palm oil is being heavily promoted as a source of energy, for producing biodiesel. Within the framework of Climate change discussions agrofuels (fuels derived from biomass) have been presented as the “solution” to the climate crisis and as an alternative to fossil fuels. The European Union alone has set targets for a 10% of agrofuels to be included in transport fuel by 2020⁵.

With Indonesia and Malaysia as the biggest producers and exporters of palm oil –accounting for some 90% of the world palm oil production- Thailand, Colombia, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea are the remaining four main producers.

When planted on an industrial scale, there are many problems associated to oil palm plantations. The negative social and environmental impacts of monoculture oil palm plantations have been documented in many countries all over the world⁶ and these impacts range from human rights violations to environmental crimes.

Oil palm production is increasing in Papua New Guinea, a country where 97% of the land is communally owned and most of its 5 million population still lives in the rural area and rely on subsistence farming for their livelihoods. The palm oil produced is mostly exported to the EU with the UK, Italy and the Netherlands being the main markets.

3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans_fat#cite_ref-105

4 The bulk of biofuel demand is met by biodiesel produced from domestically grown rapeseed. To date no or only minimal quantities of biofuel have been imported.

5 European Comisión, Energy section web site: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/renewables/index_en.htm

6 See WRM web site, www.wrm.org.uy

A hidden large-scale scheme

“The more smallholders, the more profits the companies get. It's cheap labour for the companies”. Woman from Kokoda village

Almost all oil palm in PNG is grown under the so-called Nucleus Estate Smallholder Scheme, whereby a central company –holding a large plantation- contracts small farmers to supply it with additional oil palm fruit. Promoted by International Financial Institutions as a way for “alleviating” poverty in the country and allowing farmers to gain access to the cash economy, this scheme is allowing the agribusiness sector to increase corporate business while reducing investments and costs for the companies. Corporations don't need to buy more land to make way for plantations, they have cheap labor from the small landowners, no workers unions, and their responsibility over the ecological impacts of plantations is faded away.

Communities have been encouraged to plant oil palm “blocks” on their lands with loan facilities to buy seedlings, fertilizers and agrotoxics offered by the government. While the average land tenure is around 4 to 6 hectares of land, the blocks occupy two hectares in size. The smallholder-schemes promoted in PNG are part of a large scale plantation where their blocks are part of a complex formed of many thousands of hectares. Today it is estimated that the country has more than 100,000 hectares of oil palm plantations.

Loss of food sovereignty

Not only forest and agricultural land must be cleared to make space for oil palm but also the land allocated to the oil palm blocks can no longer be used for food production, for making their “gardens” -as local people call them in Papua New Guinea.

“Therefore, we have limited land for gardening and no more forest for hunting wild animals. The land we have is being used over and over again and its ability to support food production is decreasing. In ten years time, we will face food shortage. Actually we are experiencing it right [now] but it will be worse in ten years. Because the forests are gone we lack protein in our diets”. (Woman from Kokoda Village)

Dependence on one crop may end up creating economic problems. For example, the recent sharp fall in commodity prices (including palm oil) has put at stake future incomes from the oil palm fruit.

Land disputes

Women from different provinces have expressed concern about increasing population and future land shortages due to oil palm expansion. Land which has never been a problem before -as the population density was quite low- is now becoming a very scarce resource. This is clearly reflected in increasing intra and inter-clan land disputes. According to the President of the Women's Council at Kokoda, land disputes are a major issue now, and more than 50% of court cases are related to land.

“Much of land has been stolen by the State and we are almost landless in own land that is rightfully ours by history, culture and tradition. The land which the company has taken is our birthright inheritance reaped from us.” (Woman from Kokoda Village)

Health

The use of agrotoxics in the plantations is contaminating rivers, streams, as well as soils and the air, affecting people's health.

“Health is a very big concern in our place right now. When sun heats the chemicals sprayed in the company estates and even VOPs,[Village Oil Palm] we breathe in the chemical. I’m pretty sure we are inhaling dangerous substances and definitely are dying every minute. Some pregnant mothers have babies who develop asthma within first one or two months after birth. During my time there was never such a thing. The chemicals are killing us; we will all die sooner.” (Woman from Saga Village)

Hard work needed during the harvest and transport of the fruit is also affecting women:

“I am not harvesting my oil palm now because of the hardship that I have faced as my estate is about 12 kilometers from the loading area. It is very hard work transporting bunches to the river bank, then ferrying them to the other side of the river on rubber tubes. After about 6 years now I am giving up. Most of the time we get sick, sustain big cuts and bruises and generally we are losing our health status because of all the hard work we do even in bad weather.” (Woman from Botue Village)

How oil palm plantations affect women

Women explain how oil palm reinforces male control over women:

- Men usually have more control over the income from oil palm production than women. This is mainly because oil palm companies usually talk to men instead of women. It is also because the highest paying jobs on an oil palm plantation go to men (i.e. chopping the large bunches of fruits from the trees).
- Conversion of traditional farmlands to oil palm plantations restricts women’s access to garden land making it harder for them to provide food for their families. Gardens are important both for feeding the family, and selling garden food at local markets. Women usually have control of income earned from the markets, unlike oil palm income which men often control. They also lose an important moment for socializing.
- Often, women only get a tiny amount of the money their husbands earn from oil palm, even though they have contributed to the production of palm fruits. Many say that the money they get from their husbands is only enough to buy store food for the family for a couple of days after pay day.
- Families now have to rely on store food since there is less land for gardens and subsistence farming.
- Domestic violence has become common around payday- men often spend the money carelessly on gambling and beer while women struggle for cash to buy essential household items.

Unfulfilled promises

Promoted as the new panacea for Papua New Guineans, that would bring about many improvements, oil palm plantations have not lived up to expectations.

At the workshop, women complained that:

“The only sign of spin offs in the village are trade stores that were built from our own money earned from oil palm. But the trade stores are operating on ad hoc basis (seasonal), the stores are fully stocked during bigger harvests (and high prices) and at times (during low prices) there will be no stock.

That is as far as spin off services go. Other spin off services like schools, health and transport in our village is virtually nil. Many times our children stay back at home and do miss out on

school because the village is flooding and they cannot cross it. Because of that we built our own elementary school using corrugated iron and timber so that our children will easily receive education but the school inspector said that we do not have enough children. Currently we have less than 30 children and we need more than that to qualify for elementary school status. So now our children have to attend Mamba Estate elementary and go to Kokoda for their primary schooling which is quite a distance for a 5-7 year old child.”

Among the resolutions of the workshop conducted in PNG, the women “united in one voice” and called for the recognition of their rights in all decision making processes and demanded a stop to any further oil palm development.

Brazil: Women impacted by eucalyptus plantations speak out

World consumption of paper has exploded over the past 50 years. Since the early 1960's world paper consumption has increased fivefold, to the point where today we consume more than one million tonnes of paper each and every day.

Wasteful paper consumption is growing at an alarming rate while for the majority of the world's population paper is a scarce luxury. High income countries consume, on average, 57 times more paper than low income countries. These high rates are directly correlated with wasteful consumption practices.

Only about 1/3 of paper production is used for writing and printing paper, most of which is used for advertising. And almost half of all paper produced is used for packaging.

For ensuring increasing paper consumption levels, huge areas of large scale tree plantations are being established in Southern countries by the pulp and paper industry. This industry is among the world's largest generators of air and water pollutants, waste products, and the gases that cause climate change. It is also one of the largest users of raw materials, ranking first in industrial consumption of freshwater and fifth in industrial energy use globally.

The pulp industry is increasingly moving its operations to the South as a number of conditions in these countries allow for large corporate profits. Fast-wood monoculture tree plantations have been a key factor in the increase of paper consumption.

Fast-wood monoculture tree plantations are vast areas of land covered with a single alien tree species, planted uniformly and managed intensively with the sole objective of maximizing wood biomass production. These plantations are developed as monoculture tree crops supported by a technological package, including mechanization, chemical fertilization and the use of agro toxics.

Large-scale monoculture tree plantations cause serious social, environmental and economic impacts for local populations and ecosystems. Country after country land is appropriated by large, often foreign, corporate landowners, local communities are displaced, and an extensive transformation of the landscape begins -where native ecosystems are replaced with "green deserts". Local animals and plants disappear in the planted areas. Water resources are depleted and polluted by the plantations while soils become degraded. Human rights violations are strife, ranging from the loss of livelihoods and displacement to repression and even cases of torture and death.

Pulpwood plantations are widespread in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, South Africa, Swaziland, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil.

European companies, aid agencies and institutions play a significant role in promoting the expansion of the pulp and paper industry in the South. The largest pulp and paper machinery

exporters are Germany and Finland. In 2005, Germany exported more than USD2 billion worth of pulp and paper machinery and Finland more than USD1 billion. European companies and institutions promote the expansion of the pulp and paper industry in the global South not as a form of “development” but because it is beneficial to Europe⁷.

Furthermore, paper consumption rates in Europe -together with the United States- are among the highest.

Feeding European markets

While most of pulp for export production is based along the Atlantic coast, in recent times the pulp industry is expanding more intensively to the most Southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, called the “sul-rio-grandense Pampa” (grassland area of the state of Rio Grande do Sul). The Pampa landscape, characterized by grassland vegetation, with prevailing plain relief, and by denser, shrublike and tree vegetation in slopes and along streams, apart from the existence of swamps, is experimenting an extensive transformation where the native ecosystem is replaced with "green deserts": the eucalyptus monocultures.

Since 2003, environmental licenses for eucalyptus plantations are being released on a precarious basis, breaching rules and without having completed an Environmental Zoning for Forestry activities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul.

Three main actors moving to that region are: Aracruz Celulose, Votorantim Celulose Papel and the Swedish-Finnish Stora Enso. While Aracruz and Votorantim are Brazilian companies, the markets for their products are mainly European countries.

Daily subsistence at stake

The expansion of forestry activities have led to loss of productivity of land in different regions and put at stake the livelihoods of families who opt for staying in the rural areas. It has been necessary to use fertilizers more intensively in family farming.

[In the past] *"It wasn't so necessary to plough so much the land, use fertilizers, and today you have to or you won't get anything. We planted rice because there were small ponds, where dairy cows were left to drink water. (...) It is difficult even to plant sweet potato and manioc; formerly we got them from one year to the other, now there are no more."* Woman worker of Herval

The family dairy production is becoming each and every time more unfeasible; given that production is not being collected close to the farm, it is necessary to transport milk to a more distant place. The awful condition of the roads, caused by the plantation company' trucks, makes it difficult and many times it even impedes the circulation of the truck that gathers the dairy production:

Water shortage is another outcome of monoculture eucalyptus plantations. In São José do Norte water does not have the same quality as in past times and there is water only in few places.

In other places, eucalyptus planted near farms have caused a barrier against the wind that prevents the circulation of air and enables flies to propagate thus contributing to infections and diseases.

Monk parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*) generally live in forests. Upon their disappearance they found in eucalyptus a perfect place to build their nests in the highest branches where they are

7 Extracted from Chris Lang's work “Plantations, Poverty and Power” available at http://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/Plantations_Poverty_Power.pdf

protected from the attack of their natural enemies and can easily find food in nearby corn crops. The few rural producers who still plant corn suffer the attack of parakeets causing many of them to desist from planting corn.

Predatory wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) have reproduced in an uncontrolled manner in RS and use the monocultures of eucalyptus as hideout and shelter.

Life has become harder for rural communities. But not only for them: many families who have been forced to sell their lands for pulp companies went to live in the cities. There, they face difficult conditions of daily subsistence, because many of them have low degrees of schooling and this makes it difficult to obtain a good job. Besides, there they are not able to have gardens for family subsistence. Women who go to the city generally end up obtaining jobs as maids in urban family houses:

"Poverty increases in cities because these people who sell their lands go to the outskirts. And they go to the city to do what?" Rural woman worker of Encruzilhada do Sul

What jobs?

Plantations mostly offer jobs to men while the few opportunities open to women reinforce their role in services considered as inferior and less visible. Tasks developed by women for the pulp companies are almost insignificant and they may only work as cooks for the labourers who plant the eucalyptus. In Barra do Ribeiro the only source of employment that plantations provide for women are at the eucalyptus tree nursery.

Most women who work in the tree nurseries have tendonitis problems, causing injuries due to repetitive efforts. There have been also cases of serious skin allergies –presumably due to chemical products used at work.

When men leave to work in the eucalyptus plantations women usually become overburdened as they have to take care of the family and deal with traditional household chores without help. The women and the family are alone for a longer time and women need also to assume the tasks in the farm.

Violence due to plantations

The expansion of eucalyptus monocultures with the arrival of foreign and unknown workers has promoted forms of sexual harassment as well as male chauvinist and sexist attitudes that have created situations of fear and insecurity for women and their families. This has obviously meant a setback in the independence and autonomy of rural women, thus contributing to a greater female disempowerment.

Loss of cultural identity and traditions

During the workshop, one of the first impacts of eucalyptus industrial plantations narrated by women related to the loss of cultural identity because of the fact that they cannot live as a family of farmers. Difficulties are immense; public policies are not addressed to small farmers, to family farming, to agroecology. These difficulties contribute to the displacement of the rural population to the cities. This displacement, although not only due to forestry activities, causes the slow loss of local identity. With the exodus of families, many years of local knowledge related to the rural production where women have a significant role, disappear.

After the irruption of large-scale eucalyptus plantations the most visible change commented by all women at the workshop was the loss of medicinal plants of the Pampa, whose gathering is carried out by women. The tradition of gathering of the medicinal herb Macela (*Achyrocline satureioides*) - a plant used for digestive purposes-- in Rio Grande do Sul is being damaged with the expansion of the eucalyptus plantations in the field. Other medicinal plants will also be affected by the expansion of the eucalyptus, such as Espinheira-santa (*Maytenus ilicifolia*) --used in the treatment of gastritis and ulcer.

Resisting eucalyptus plantations

In 2006, on International Women's Day, two thousand women of Via Campesina occupied before dawn the tree nursery of Aracruz Celulose in Rio Grande do Sul. In a sudden action, with lilac bandages on their faces, they destroyed thousands of seedlings of eucalyptus. The movement aimed at calling the attention of Brazilian public opinion to the impacts produced by monocultures of eucalyptus and pines on the people and local ecosystems. This demonstration had a very strong impact in Brazil and in the rest of the world.

In São José do Norte many rural families are "isolated" due to the plantations of pines and eucalyptus. However, they are resisting the sale of their lands.

In Encruzilhada do Sul, the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas (MMC) (Peasant Women Movement) is developing projects of strategies and resistance aiming at food sovereignty, as well as community gardens. They have also promoted debates in the community so as to clarify the problem of eucalyptus monocultures.

The participation of women in resistance movements targeted on land reform, food sovereignty, maintenance of families in rural areas, has altered their position or duties in the community. Women have transformed from invisible to visible, mainly by the direct action taken in Aracruz's tree nursery in the municipality of Barra do Ribeiro in 2006. In March 8 2007, 1,300 women from Via Campesina, occupied four land holdings belonging to forestry corporations, to denounce that the green desert is stopping the agrarian reform and making peasant agriculture unfeasible. In the year 2008, again within the framework of International Women's Day, 900 women, members of Via Campesina in Rio Grande do Sul occupied 21,00 hectares of monoculture eucalyptus plantations belonging to the Swedish-Finnish transnational company, Stora Enso, in the frontier zone with Uruguay. Women cut the eucalyptus and replaced them with native trees. The police then violently attacked the demonstration.

In every place plantation companies try to hinder the struggle against eucalyptus monocultures by interfering in local activities and life to create a good image of institutional social responsibility:

"These companies seem a large octopus with tentacles in all fields of society." Fisherwoman of São José do Norte

Women are playing a leading role in the struggle against the expansion of tree monocultures. They have the potential to make "the new to happen". Unification of the action of urban women with the action of rural women will strengthen the struggle against the expansion of mega projects of pulp companies in the sul-rio-grandense Pampa.